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Virginia Taking Measures to Curb Teen Dating Violence

Advanced technology augmenting abusive behavior in teen relationships

Richmond, Va. – The most recent [poll](#) from the national [Family Violence Prevention Fund](#) finds alarming numbers on teen dating violence. Almost half of American teenagers have been in a relationship in which they felt controlled, threatened and pressured to do things they did not want to do. Nearly one in three was a victim of sexual or physical abuse or threats of physical abuse. Nearly one in four has been victimized through technology.

Technology now plays a key role in teen dating violence. Teenagers may use electronic media to embarrass, harass, stalk or threaten their peers, especially when dating. The [Centers for Disease Control](#) now officially identifies such abuse as [electronic aggression](#). “Texting, video streaming, photo sharing and social networking are an integral part of their lives,” said Fran Inge, director of the Virginia Family and Children’s Trust Fund (FACT) “While advanced technology has many positive benefits, we’re also seeing it used to abuse and humiliate others. And because it’s so instant, things can escalate very quickly,” she said.

Abusive behavior is not just limited to hitting or slapping. Threats, controlling behavior, demands and excessive contact also are forms of abuse. According to a recent [Technology and Teen Dating Abuse Survey](#), one in three teens say they are text messaged 10, 20, even 30 times per hour by a partner inquiring where they are and with whom.

“Many teenagers are not equipped to handle serious relationships, nor are they usually prepared to properly respond when a relationship turns abusive. So when bullying, abusive texting or cruel internet activity occurs, they usually don’t tell their parents, don’t know how to make it stop and often participate in it, which makes the situation worse,” Inge noted.

According to the recently-released [FACT report, Violence at Home](#), one in three homicides in Virginia resulted from domestic or intimate partner violence, and more than 61 percent of reported sexual assault victims in the Commonwealth are under the age of 18.

The FACT report also revealed that only a small amount of information is available on teen dating violence in the Commonwealth. “One of the gaps noted in the report is that there is little data on teen relationships collected in Virginia localities. Even though national data clearly tells us it exists, we have virtually no information reporting in Virginia,” Inge said, adding that community involvement is needed. “We ask policy makers and state and local government officials to examine the issue and investigate if and how data on youth dating violence is being collected. You must have proper information and know how prevalent a problem is in order to address and correct it.”

Parents also play a critical role. Many are not aware of the abuse their child may be enduring or committing. Inge encourages parents to educate themselves and become proactive with their teenagers and their use of technology. “Talk to your kids. Find out about their friends and relationships. Ask questions. Know what’s going on in their lives and how they are using technology. If something is getting out of hand, take action and contact authorities. As a parent, you not only have a right to get involved, you have a duty,” Inge said.

Governor Bob McDonnell has declared October as [Domestic Violence Awareness Month](#) in Virginia. The toll-free, statewide domestic violence hotline number is 1-800-838-8238.

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